



NEWS RELEASE

State of Iowa Office of Ombudsman

April 4, 2016

Office of Ombudsman
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1112 E. Grand Avenue
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RE: 2015 Annual Report

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DES MOINES—Complaints and questions to the Iowa Office of Ombudsman increased by 7 percent in 2015, and those numbers may go up even further this year, according to the Ombudsman's annual report released today.

The Ombudsman opened more than 4,400 cases last year, more than two thirds of which were jurisdictional complaints. While the Ombudsman's investigators spend much of their time informing citizens how state and local governments work and coaching them on how to resolve problems, the office also investigates issues when merited. Issues ranged from unreasonable water bills and unemployment denials to delays in prescription approvals and decisions of state licensing boards. Cases involving state government agencies made up 46 percent of the cases; local government represented 39 percent of the cases opened in 2015.

The Ombudsman's annual report features select examples of casework done during the year and provides a statistical analysis of where the complaints originated and which agencies they concerned.

"I believe the Ombudsman serves as the eyes and ears of legislators and citizens to identify problems that need fixing and processes that need improvement," Acting Ombudsman Kristie Hirschman wrote in the report. "I am convinced that our office saves government agencies time, litigation, and money."

Hirschman also wrote in the report that she anticipates complaint numbers to increase again in 2016 due to two recent developments. The state's transition to managed care for Medicaid recipients is expected to spur questions and concerns among recipients and providers. Hirschman said she has requested additional employees to handle the anticipated increase in these contacts.

Prison inmates also have begun to call the office more frequently after a decision by the Federal Communications Commission prompted the Iowa Department of Corrections to dramatically lower phone rates.

The Ombudsman's report can be found online at www.legis.iowa.gov/Ombudsman